

## [Crossing the Plains]

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Folklore Collection (or Type)

Title Crossing the plains - Early Polk county days.

Place of origin Portland, Oregon Date 4/27/39

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Project worker Sara B. Wrenn

Project editor

Remarks

Form A

Circumstances of Interview

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Sara B. Wrenn Date April 27, 1939

Address 505 Elks Building, Portland, Oregon

Subject Crossing the Plains - Early Polk County Days

Name and address of informant Mrs. Jane Lee Smith 1803 Se 54th Ave. Portland, Oregon

Date and time of interview April 26, 1939 - afternoon

Place of interview Above address

Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant

Mrs. J. I. Kisabeth, 4828 SE Kelly St.

Name and address of persons if any, accompanying you none

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Description of room, houses surroundings, etc.

Small, crowded "parlor," the walls covered with oil paintings, the work of the informant, embracing such subjects as snow peaks with sunset glows, mountain lakes, etc.

There are wall brackets and corner brackets, besides tables and little stands and the fireplace mantel, all crowded with small china and other objects "d'art." The room is full of overstuffed chairs and couches of various colors. The house itself is the ordinary story-and-a-half type of the 90's, with a "front porch", its setting [?] 50 by 100 feet lot, with a few feet of green grass in front.

Form B

Personal History of Informant

Federal Writers' Project

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Information obtained should supply the following facts:

1. Ancestry

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2. Place and date of birth
3. Family
4. Places lived in, with dates
5. Education, with dates
6. Occupations and accomplishments with dates
7. Special skills and interests
8. Community and religious activities
9. Description of informant
10. Other points gained in interview

1. Father, Nicholas Lee, (English); Mother, Sarah Hopper Lee, (English).
2. Dallas, Oregon. 1853.
3. Deceased husband's name, John E. Smith; two sons deceased; daughters, Mrs. Eva C. Cadigan, Troutdale; Mrs. Irma Berry, living with mother.
4. Always lived in Oregon, at Dallas until 1913, and since then at present address.
5. Dallas Academy; Willamette University (2 years).
6. Housewife - seamstress - teacher of music.
7. Music and painting.
8. Always an active member of Methodist Church; Member of Eastern Star.

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9. Stout and jolly, with gray eyes and gray hair. Possesses young voice and laugh, with an excellent vocabulary.

10. Intelligent and wide-awake.

Form C

Text of Interview (Unedited)

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Text: My father and mother crossed the plains in 1847, with the usual experiences attending that long trip. Something unusual that happened was the thunder storm they encountered shortly after crossing the Platte river. Father and mother were walking, it seemed, when this terrible thunderstorm came up. Suddenly there was a tremendous flash of lightning, followed by a roar of thunder. Father and mother were both thrown on to their knees. In the wagon in front of theirs two little children were in the rear of the wagon box; they had been leaning out and playing with the horns of the oxen trudging along behind.

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One of the children was found to be stunned, but not otherwise hurt; the other one was killed.

Among father's oxen was an old animal they called Brindy — for Brindle I guess. Once on the plains Brindy was found to have an arrow in his flank. It was supposed an Indian had shot it, but nobody knew just when it happened. Anyway, after that, Brindy had it in for redskins. Everytime one came near, Brindy would snort like all get out, so they always knew when Indians were lurking around. We had Brindy for many years. After I was born and big enough to go berrying we children were down in the pasture, picking strawberries. Brindy and the other cattle - father had quite a 2 bunch of Durham cattle by then — were not far away quietly munching grass, when all at once we heard Brindy snorting. Woughf! Woughf! he went, and there those cattle were, all lined up for battle, with old Brindy out in front, pawing the ground and snorting like mad. We couldn't imagine what was the matter, and then we saw two squaws, creeping through the brush and out of sight as fast as they could go. Old Brindy wasn't going to let any “Injuns” have the strawberries of his folks.

What did we wear in those days? I guess we wore just about all there was to be found to wear, kitchen stove an' everything. It was worse 'n the hats the women wear now. Hoops and petticoats, an' corset covers an' corsets — great big heavy stiff things — I don' know how we managed so many clothes. There was a fleshy lady living down on the Luckiamute that got caught in a hole in the river on her pony. The Luckiamute was always a mighty treacherous stream. Every time there was a freshet the current would change, so one never knew just where to ford the stream. This lady was with a party and they were all horseback. She was on a little pony, and she was kinda big and fat. The pony stepped in a hole, and with her weight on it, it couldn't get out. The lady had hoops on, and when the men went to help her, her hoops caught on the curved under horn of the side saddle. They tried to get the hoops out and in doing so twisted them, and there she was. The pony couldn't budge and they couldn't get her off, and the pony couldn't get out of the hole as long as she was on its back, she was so heavy. Finally they gave a big tug at the hoops and got 'em loose, an' then they managed to lift her up and hold her till the pony struggled

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out, an' then they dropped her in the saddle and she rode the pony on across — an' was she “red in the face” as the young 3 folks say nowadays.

There were a number of Swedes lived in our neighborhood. They hadn't been over very long and none of them knew any English. A friend of mine wanted one of the girls to work for her; she wanted the girl to help her make soap. She had a big iron kettle over a fire in the yard and she had a wooden paddle to stir the soap mixture with. She was trying to tell the girl in pantomime what to do and picked up the paddle to show her. The girl, with no idea what it was all about, gave her a seared look, yelped, as she dodged what she thought was a paddling for sure, and ran like everything for home.

Oh yes, of course I went to camp meetings, but they were all very calm sort of affairs. Being a Methodist, we had no immersions, but I've seen a lot of immersions. There wasn't anything particular to tell about, except once, when a woman had on a lot of false hair, and when she came out of the water, the pins were sticking out and the hair was just about ready to fall off. The women got together quick and pinned the hair on tight.

### STORY OF THE PARROT EGGS

One of our early neighbors had a parrot, with beautiful green and red plumage. It was the first parrot a great many people there-about had ever seen and they were full of curiosity about it. One of the things asked was, did the parrot lay eggs. “Oh, yes”, our neighbor, who was of Irish descent, replied, “yes, of course, it lays eggs.” “Are they good, do you ever eat 'em?” the questioner continued. “Yes, indeed, we eat them; they're very good,” our neighbor responded. Well, it ended up by the parrot-owner agreeing to sell them some of her parrot eggs, to save which, naturally, required several days. To make her promise good, she hunted around and saved her pullet eggs; these she 4 decorated with yellow spots. Telling her would-be patrons about when her eggs would be ready and allowing plenty of time for their “laying.” Some of her egg-buyers wanted eight and some wanted six and so on. Of course it took quite a while for one parrot to lay that many eggs, but as

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she got a dollar apiece, she figured the business was fairly prosperous. But I guess she got a little avaricious or something. Anyway the egg-buyers seem to have got together and compared notes on the number of eggs bought, and the result of their figuring showed the parrot to be laying about three eggs a day, and it a male parrot at that!

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My father was the first man to have a real carriage in that part of the country. It was a very grand affair that was brought around the Horn. It was very black and shiney on the outside and all upholstered with maroon broadcloth or something of the kind on the inside, and the top had a fringe around it. The harness used with the carriage was silver-plated. We felt very tony when we went riding in that new carriage. We had the first sewing machine — a Singer I think, or maybe it was a Wheeler and Wilson. All the neighbors used to come in for an afternoon of sewing; they'd make a regular "bee" of it. That machine sure did help out, especially in the making of their men's pants, the long seams of which they had been in the habit of stitching with careful back-stitching, a slow and painstaking process. With our machine, they would simply baste those long seams and mother would sit down at the new-fangled sewing thing and run 'em off in a jiffy.

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Form D

Extra Comment

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Comment:

Possessing a keen sense of humor as she does, it is to be regretted that Mrs. Smith had so little to tell, but, like so many of the Portland informants, most of her life has been outside of the folklore environment.